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WASHINGTON, DC - The U.S. House of Representatives today passed legislation extending a federal waiver that gives school districts impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita more flexibility in drawing down and utilizing federal money for recovery efforts. The waiver was scheduled to expire on September 30th. Melancon is an original co-sponsor of the bipartisan legislation, which passed the House with a voice vote this evening.

"These waivers have been critical to the recovery of schools in parishes impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, enabling them to access much-needed reconstruction funds," said Melancon. "In communities like St. Bernard Parish, the hurricanes devastated the local tax base and school systems do not have the financial resources to operate or rebuild.

"Families are returning home to these communities every day, despite the fact that many schools are still in need of repair. I thank my colleagues in Congress for supporting this bipartisan legislation and giving these schools the flexibility they need to continue their dedicated efforts to rebuild and help students and teachers return to the classroom."

The bill, H.R. 6106, will allow schools to continue to use state money for the 10% local match required by FEMA in order for them to be eligible for the 90% federal reimbursement for recovery projects. The bill will also allow school districts to use funds appropriated by Congress in the Defense/Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill (H.R. 2863) to pay for expenses state money would normally be used for, such as teachers' salaries and school operational needs.

St. Bernard Parish Superintendent Doris Voitier offered the following comments upon hearing of the bill's passage: **"These monies are vital to the survival our community because they will allow us to reopen schools for our children. Rep. Melancon has been a true friend to our children in St. Bernard and I would like to thank him and all of our congressmen in Louisiana, including Rep. Jindal and Rep. Boustany, for sponsoring this bill.**

"I would also like to thank Rep. Adam Schiff and Rep. Bobby Scott for co-sponsoring this bill. Although these two Congressmen are not from the Gulf Coast, they took time last August to travel to Louisiana with Mr. Melancon and attend our school's 'Day of Reflection' breakfast. I told them about the need for this legislation during an education discussion group we participated in as part of Mr. Melancon's hurricane recovery policy forum. I am so thankful to Mr. Melancon, Mr. Schiff and Mr. Scott for coming down to see our children and our struggles. Without their help, none of this would be possible."

Using this waiver, Superintendent Voitier was able to open the St. Bernard Unified School only 11 weeks after the storm, holding classes in trailers in front of Chalmette High School for 334 students. A year after Hurricane Katrina, Chalmette High is operating at full capacity with 1700 students. The school district has also recently opened up a second school in St. Bernard, Andrew Jackson, with 1800 students, and is working toward opening the third, Tryst Middle School.

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